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# MAKING THE MOST OF YOUR YEARS

BY EVELYN HART

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# MAKING THE MOST OF YOUR YEARS

BY EVELYN HART

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OLD AGE is not an achievement of the privileged few these days. It is the destiny of most of us. If you were born in the early years of this century, the chances are you will live to be 70 or possibly 80. If you were born in 1958, many authorities give you excellent odds on living to be 90 or 100, barring accidents and disasters.

Aging is a constant, universal process. Today you are twenty-four hours older than you were at this time yesterday. So is everyone else. You cannot halt the aging process. It goes on, minute after minute, regardless of world events, legislation, or your own personal feelings.

Aging is something you can neither ignore nor escape—but it is something that can provide you with many basic satisfactions. The process itself is beyond your control, but *how* it affects you is something you can largely determine. If you recoil from the whole idea of aging because you envision yourself as becoming penniless, toothless, friendless, helpless, and pitiful, then please

walk—do not run—to the nearest library and ask for all the current literature on the subject of “aging.” You will need a fleet of trailer trucks to carry it home.

### **who cares?**

If you think nobody cares whether you become penniless, toothless, friendless, helpless, and pitiful, then you are the victim of a great delusion. Even casual investigation reveals that practically everyone cares—your federal government, your state government, your local officials, your churches, your educational groups, your welfare agencies, your labor unions, many of your industries, and many, many of your fellow citizens. Never in the history of this country have so many people been actively engaged in projects designed to make the late years of life pleasant, peaceful, and productive.

Our years of childhood, adolescence, early adulthood, and middle age are a preface to, and in a sense, a preparation for our older years. And the later years, a culmination. Yet, there is a tendency among us to postpone, to ward off, to resist that culmination. And this way, almost inevitably, disaster lies.

### **the story of Janet M—**

A few years ago, Janet M——— was enjoying a successful career in radio, playing ingenue roles in daytime serials. As she advanced into her forties, her friends urged her to branch out into character acting to prolong her career. She was horrified. In her own mind, a switch to character parts meant admission of declining youth, of defeat. She still looked 30, said she felt even younger and would not admit that her voice sounded middle-aged. She clung grimly to her ingenue roles until she lost them, one by one, and her voice has not been heard on radio for a number of years. She is an embittered “old lady” in her fifties, seeking peace of mind through heavy drinking and finding only ill health and emptiness. She held her youth so tightly in her closed fists that she had no chance to mature

gracefully, to send down the roots that would grow strong and develop, during her later years, into major satisfaction. She is faced now, in middle age, with the emptiness that she so feared and which might so easily have been avoided. She did not know, nor would she ever have believed that *“ . . . life does not cease when you are old, it only suffers a rich change.”*



## **GROWING OLDER**

At a party recently where a group of friends who had not seen one another for nearly a dozen years were having a thoroughly delightful reunion, one of the guests exclaimed: “Isn’t it dreadful to realize that all of us have become middle-aged?”

“I don’t think so,” another answered quickly. “I’m enjoying it. I’m far happier than when we last saw one another, and I think it’s because I’m no longer beating my head against the wall. I can accept calmly now certain limitations, certain inevitable defeats. Every disappointment is not a colossal tragedy. Life is easier and more comfortable.”

The aging process carries with it many advantages as well as disadvantages, many compensations as well as liabilities, many joys as well as sorrows. Of course, there will be problems. Every phase of our lives is beset with problems. In adolescence they may be staggering. The degree of happiness we attain at any age is determined, in large measure, by the way we face our problems and work out our solutions. “Getting older” is universal, but “growing older” is personal, involving a willingness to look ahead and plan for the future.

## **suddenly—65!**

Any man who would drive his car along a winding highway at night without headlights is either stupid or dangerously reckless. But, what about the man who travels through his middle years living up to the last penny of his income, ignoring physical danger signals, developing no interests outside his job, happy in the belief that his life will be always thus? Suddenly, he is 65. Why, he can't believe it! But, everybody else believes it and he finds himself holding a gift-wrapped gold watch in one hand and his retirement papers in the other while his fellow-workers tell him how lucky he is. He closes his desk for the last time and goes home, the cold fear in his heart creeping out along every nerve in his body. How will he fill his long, lonely, empty days? Shall he join those old men he's always felt sorry for—the idle ones on the benches outside City Hall? He's been shelved, put out to pasture, written off. He begins to notice new aches and pains. He feels miserable, but he really can't afford to go to a doctor. What difference does it make, anyway?

What a dreadful, unnecessary waste! This man's later years are not only a personal tragedy, but they represent a sad loss to the community and to his friends. Was his an inevitable fate, or might he have averted it somewhere along the way? For an answer, let's take a quick look at the career of a man now nearing 80, a happy and alert individual enjoying the respect of his neighbors and still contributing to the welfare of his community. Is he just lucky? Well, let's see.

This man spent the greater part of his life in the medium-sized community where he still lives, worked as office manager in a small concern, made a modest salary, budgeted his income wisely and managed to take care of his family adequately while also putting aside a small sum regularly for insurance and, ultimately, for careful investments. When his children grew up and went off on their own, he began participating more and more in civic affairs, working in the United Fund campaigns, serving as a volunteer at the local hospital and heading a group that

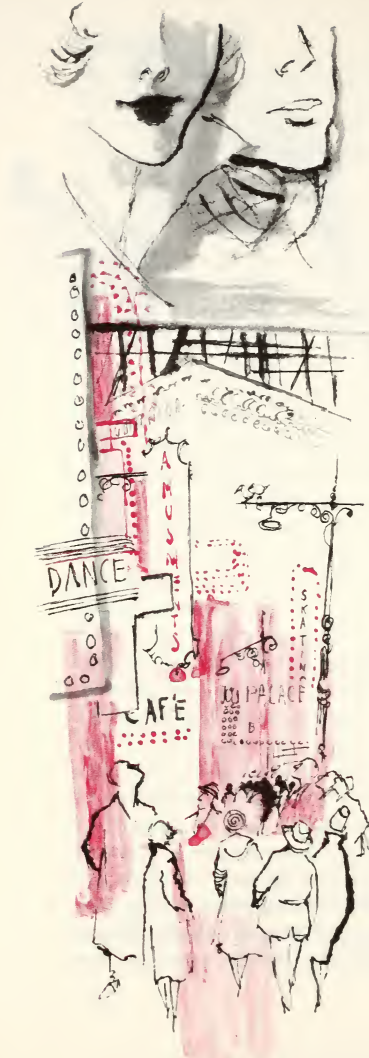


visited shut-ins regularly. He spent more time in his garden, where he became fascinated by experiments in producing new varieties of iris, and during the winter months he and his wife attended a painting class in the adult education night school. He, too, was retired at 65 and pocketed his gold watch with a broad smile of satisfaction agreeing with his fellow-workers that he was lucky, he could now do all the things he wanted to do.

Two years later, his wife died. This was a severe blow from which he recovered slowly. His son and daughter-in-law urged him to come live with them, but he graciously refused. He sought advice from the Family Service Bureau where he was acquainted with several staff members through his participation in the United Fund drives. He furnished a small ground-floor apartment with his own belongings. He was free to continue his experiments in a plot of his own in a nearby garden. He had kept at his painting, and he organized an exhibition of the work done by some of his neighbors whom he had persuaded to attend the painting class with him. He maintained his life-long routine of regular physical check-ups and adjusted his activities and his eating habits according to the doctor's advice.

These days he doesn't do much active gardening, but tends his luxuriant window boxes. Each week he goes with his friends to the meetings of the Golden Age Club which he helped to organize some years ago and where he supervises a painting project. He serves on several civic committees, still does his part in the annual fund-raising drive, and frequently is a speaker at Garden Club meetings. He considers himself a lucky fellow. But, obviously, his happy and productive twilight years are the





result of things more practical and dependable than mere luck. Their seeds were planted in early adulthood and carefully nurtured through middle age. This man did not simply “get older”—he took pains to “grow” as he aged.

In short, it's no good to hide our heads in the sands of our twenties and thirties, for the winds of time blow away those sands and leave us exposed and vulnerable, defenseless and unprepared for the rigors of our sixties and seventies. Strange, that we accept the need for thorough training in our business or professional careers, that we seek guidance and expert advice in planning those careers, yet give so little thought to what our daily lives will be at the end of those careers. Perhaps this is a basic reason for the fear that drags at our steps as we approach old age.

### **our changing society**

We have been, for a long period, a work-centered society, a future-oriented, youth-worshipping culture. Speed, power, and efficiency have been our triple goals. Streamlined auto-



mobiles give us tremendous mobility, labor-saving devices give us increased leisure time. Industrialization has driven us into cities where most of us are smaller cogs in larger wheels and where we live in compact apartments. All of this has wrought drastic changes in our pattern of living, has created multiple problems for the elderly among us. Time was when grandmother was a most highly respected member of the family, and she had her traditional, active role to play in family affairs. She sat quietly by the warm hearth, secure and content. She sewed and knitted, helped care for her grandchildren, made her contribution to the welfare of the family unit.

### **no room for grandma?**

Today, in our small apartments, there is no warm hearth, and there is no room for grandmother. There are countless grandmothers today living in lonely little rooms, without family tasks, without friends, without roots, without a reason for existence.

We cannot turn back to the old days nor reconstruct those spacious farmhouses where there was room for all. But we can push the pendulum on to the point where all members of the family, young and old alike, can live their lives with self-respect and satisfaction.

More and more of us are becoming increasingly aware of the needs of the aging and of the vital necessity of meeting those needs. In 1900, little more than a half-century ago, there were only three million people who were 65 or older. Today, there are fifteen million people in that age bracket, and thirty-four million more between 45 and 64. The senior citizens are becoming a segment of population to be reckoned with! Their very numbers are making an impact on society, bringing about gradual changes in attitude toward old age and retirement.

How you fare as you approach the older age group and finally become a member of it will depend on your own attitude toward aging—whether you are willing just to get old or whether you prefer growing old. It will depend, too, on the interests and

hobbies you develop, on your participation in projects designed to serve others, on plans you make for your own financial independence and for the preservation of your health.

But whatever the birthday you have just celebrated, it may be tremendously helpful and warmly comforting to know what assistance you can expect along the way in maintaining your state of health and your financial independence, in finding desirable recreation and suitable housing. . . . to consider what attitudes you can expect from your family, your friends, and your community as you grow older. . . . and to think a bit about what they have a right to expect from you.

## **MAINTAINING YOUR HEALTH**

To be happy, you must be healthy. This has been understood for generations in our society. Now, medical men have shown that the reverse is also true. To be healthy, they say, you must be happy. And they can demonstrate, beyond the shadow of a doubt, that a negative attitude toward life may produce physical disturbances that may, in turn, lead to serious illness.

Perhaps you wish that you, like Jack Benny, could be 39 for the rest of your life. (But, even Mr. Benny finally reached 40.) If you've been dreading old age because you loathe the idea of becoming bent and feeble and wracked with aches and pains, then you should know that your very dread of it may make it happen. It needn't happen. If you are sensible and practical along the way, if you have regular physical check-ups, if you take just the ordinary precautions which will be noted here, if you maintain a lively interest in the world about you. . . . you have a good chance of being hale and hearty at 80. And even if you are somewhat disabled, you can still have a rich life within the limits of your disability.

Some have grown old with few aches and pains, with little physical disintegration. If others have done it, are doing it, maybe you can do it, too. There are splendid examples to follow—

Bernard Baruch, Albert Einstein, Grandma Moses, Picasso, George Bernard Shaw, Bertrand Russell, Senator Theodore F. Green of Rhode Island. And close behind are Mrs. Franklin D. Roosevelt, Leopold Stokowski, Lynn Fontanne, and many others. These are people who grow old gracefully, actively, happily. . . . and healthily.

Whichever way you prefer to state the case, it is so often evident that happiness and health are entwined, interdependent. It is important to give a little thought to the proper care of our physical bodies, neither making it a fetish nor being too casual. We as a people are probably more health-conscious today than any group has ever been in the history of mankind. Newspaper and magazine advertisements, radio and television commercials urge us to take our vitamins and brush our teeth, eat reinforced foods, strengthen our tired blood, relax our frayed nerves, keep an eye out for symptoms of this or that disease. We are instructed to see our dentist once a year and to visit our physician regularly for a thorough check-up.

No one is going to keep his health by observing TV commercials. But if all this warning makes us somewhat more aware of the importance of preventing illness, rather than waiting until illness strikes, the campaign may have at least some value.

### **using our knowledge**

With the knowledge available today, probably half of the illnesses of our people are preventable, according to Dr. Edward L. Bortz, Chief of Medical Service at Lankenau Hospital in Pennsylvania and past president of the American Medical Association. He notes further that "if all the data available for preserving life were utilized in planning the individual and the family pattern of living, many of our citizens would attain the century mark."

Dr. Bortz underscores the importance of using the known facts about *nutrition; the importance of avoiding prolonged exhaustion; the importance of sanitation; and the importance of recreational pursuits.*

The trick is to get the health knowledge that is available into the hands and habits of every man, woman, and child. This is not easy. Nor can it be done quickly. Education is a long-term process, but it is the only channel through which the job can be done. Some communities have already seen to it that health education courses in the public schools include information on problems of aging, problems that have their beginnings in the early years. Many local public health departments are concerned with distribution of information on proper nutrition, the need for recreation, the importance of preventive medicine. If these things are not being done in your community, perhaps you and your neighbors should suggest such action to your local school board members and public health officials.

## **nutrition**

Doctors will tell you that malnutrition is a major problem for many older persons although most of them do not realize it. A widow who lives alone finds preparation of meals a dismal ritual. She doesn't really enjoy dining by herself and she makes things easier by throwing together some kind of sandwich, a cup of instant coffee, and downing them while standing by the kitchen sink. After a while, her appetite disappears, she grows increasingly bored and weary, and she eats less and less. The situation is even more devastating for a widower.

If this is happening to you, or to someone you know, write for a little pamphlet titled *Food Guide for Older Folks* (Home and Garden Bulletin No. 17, U. S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D. C.). In it you'll find tips on how to prepare meals easily and effectively for one or two older persons without sacrificing elements essential to health.

Family Service Bureaus in most communities provide counseling services for older people. One of the things the counselor always stresses is the necessity of eating properly. The record shows that older people living on curtailed budgets almost always cut corners on food. This is the last thing they should do!

## **mobile services**

A few communities are experimenting with a new service for senior citizens called "Meals on Wheels." Meals are prepared in a central kitchen, and a well-cooked, well-balanced, attractively served hot dinner is delivered right to the doorstep of older people who find it difficult or impossible to cook their own hot meals or go out to a restaurant. Perhaps this is a service which an agency in your community might investigate. If it can be operated successfully, it fills a vital need in the daily lives of elderly people who may otherwise be forced to leave their own quarters and move into a home where nutritional problems will be met.

The Visiting Nurse Association, an agency well known to the residents of many communities across the country, provides expert nursing care in the home on a physician's recommendation. Where available, this service is the answer for the aged person who is temporarily ill and as well as for the person who is recuperating from a serious illness or operation and cannot afford a long stay in a hospital. If you are getting on in years and are living alone, or even if you are living with members of your family, there may lurk in the back of your mind a nagging fear that you may become ill and bedfast—then what will happen to you? It is a great comfort to know, if your fears materialize, that—in many communities—a trained nurse will visit you as many times a week as necessary to give you the care you need as long as the doctor orders it.

Nearly everyone, as he grows older, prefers to live in his own home, surrounded by his own things, even if it's only one room. In most cases, it is better for the individual's state of mind and health if this can be arranged. More and more communities in recent years are providing mobile services that enable older people to manage on their own and in their own quarters.

It is common knowledge that in some of our mental hospitals elderly people who chiefly need nursing care rather than psychiatry are occupying beds urgently needed for more seriously



ill mental patients. General hospitals are faced with a similar problem. Understaffed and overcrowded, they are called on to provide care for chronically ill elderly patients. This they cannot do, at least not adequately, under present conditions. Some hospitals are experimenting with geriatrics programs, bringing elderly patients into the hospital for surgery or for treatment of a specific ailment, then following up with "home care."

### **nursing homes**

Let's say that a member of your family is elderly and chronically, but not seriously ill—and you simply cannot provide in your home the care he must have. What can you do? You can't send him to a general hospital, for not one in your community has room for him and, besides, the expense would be prohibitive. Your next thought is a nursing home. But you've read and heard such horrifying things about nursing homes that the very idea of consigning a relative to such a place generates a feeling of guilt deep inside. But hold on a second! Nursing homes are not all the same. There are excellent ones and poor ones. Why don't you investigate the nursing homes in your area? Talk to your public health officials and perhaps someone in your Council of Social Agencies. Find out what legislation has been passed in your state, setting standards for nursing homes. Obtain a list of homes nearby and visit some of them. Talk to the person in charge. It's quite possible that you will find a home where your relative will be very well cared for, where he will be happier than he might be in your home where he might be inconveniencing others. There are other possibilities, too—a foster home or, where available, a regular homemaker service.

### **hospital and health insurance**

The expense that illness entails is often a major worry for elderly people and for their relatives. With incomes greatly reduced in later years, they find it difficult, perhaps impossible, to pay for essential medical or hospital care. More and more



people are subscribing to special plans for financing hospital care, but ironically enough, eligibility for such insurance is usually limited to persons under 65. So those whose needs are greatest and who are living on reduced incomes often are unable to buy insurance protection. This problem is arousing concern. Many suggestions have been offered to assure lifetime protection.

## **health hints**

For the sake of your own health and happiness, you might do well to consider these few basic suggestions:

*Develop the habit of visiting your doctor for regular physical checkups.*

*See your dentist at least once a year.*

*Protect yourself with adequate health insurance.*

*Consult your doctor about proper diet as you grow older.*

*If there is a health education course in your adult education program, you might consider enrolling.*

*Take an active part in seeing that essential services are provided for the older citizens in your community. Eventually you may benefit from them, too.*

## **MAINTAINING FINANCIAL INDEPENDENCE**

"All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy" is a valid warning through the middle years of life. But, after the age of 65, "no work and vanishing income makes Jack a frightened old person."

In the later years, when medical attention is essential, when special housing arrangements are desirable, when sound eating habits are vital, the major source of income is abruptly turned off. No wonder so many have been echoing the words of the King of Siam: "Is a puzzlement!"

It is indeed. And in federal, state and local conference rooms, countless commissions and committees have been pondering this illogical situation in recent years . . . and the “puzzlement” is beginning to clear up.

### **social security**

In 1958, the Social Security Act was amended. Today, 9 out of 10 Americans (nearly 95 per cent of the working population) look forward to receiving social security benefits in retirement, with maximum monthly payments of \$127 for single persons and \$190.50 for retired couples. A beneficiary is now allowed to earn as much as \$1,200 annually “on the side” without forfeiting any part of his benefits. Disabled workers may start drawing benefits at the age of 50 for themselves and their dependents.

Obviously, this is not the whole answer. There is still a substantial gap between social security benefits and the cost of maintaining a modest but adequate standard of living during the



later years. A large section of that gap will be filled ultimately for workers who currently are participants in employer-pension plans. These plans, financed jointly by employer and employee, have grown tremendously in the past twenty-five years. Today 12,000,000 workers are building future incomes for themselves in this manner.

Then, of course, there is the old-age public assistance program provided through the federal government. The number of recipients of public assistance has decreased markedly as more and more workers are being covered by social security.

### **savings**

You who are still employed and are participating in social security and a pension plan will fare far better financially in your retirement days than do many who are now retired. If you can afford a planned savings program and can make other sound investments that will pay off in later years, so much the better.





## retire at 65?

However, there is still another, equally important, retirement problem that you should begin now to think about, to prepare for....and, perhaps, to do something about. Does the concern where you are employed have an automatic retirement plan? Is there a ruling which demands that, when you reach the age of 65, you must pack up your pencils or whatever your tools and

go home? The majority of industrial plants and business firms do have such automatic rules although many have modified them.

Marion B. Folsom stated the case clearly in a talk he made as Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare. "We must avoid efforts which tend to impose uniformity on older people—efforts which apply programs and policies alike to men and women who are not alike," said Mr. Folsom. "The greatest service for older persons, I believe, is to develop an economic and social framework in which each individual may develop according to his own aspirations and adopt the mode of life best suited to his individual needs."

There's something about this life of ours in a democracy that makes us resent being pushed out of our jobs at 65, regardless of whether our work is good, bad, or indifferent—regardless of whether we're tired and burned out or physically fit and still "rarin' to go." Employers, too, are beginning to acknowledge that automatic retirement represents a tremendous loss to business and industry in terms of experience and skill. A survey conducted several years ago by the Bureau of Employment Security revealed that, in the opinion of employers, older workers: *have great stability, waste less time, are more reliable, responsible, and loyal, are absent less frequently, and need less supervision.*

True, it is more difficult to learn a new skill at 65 than it was at 25, but the old adage "you can't teach an old dog new tricks" is constantly being disproved. A number of studies have revealed that aging people do not lose the ability to learn, only the ability to learn fast. They need more time and stronger incentive, but very often reduction of speed is compensated for by skill and experience. In some types of modern jobs, the record of older workers is superior to that of younger ones.

The New Jersey Old Age Study Commission, in a summary of its findings in 1957, reported that "new and timely research on techniques of vocational retraining, job counseling, and placement of older workers is demonstrating that increasing numbers can be returned to productive employment through community referral centers, utilizing both public and private personnel and employment facilities."

"We believe," the Commission declared, "that both the individual and the economy will gain as retirement policies are made more flexible and as job reclassification, retraining, vocational counseling, and other personnel policies are adjusted to make it possible for older people to find useful employment as long as they are interested and able."

Progress is being made, but as always when precedents are being established rather than followed, progress is slow. Every American who has not yet been judged "too old for employment or re-employment" has a large stake in our changing employment practices because, ultimately, he will be affected by them. It behooves all of us to help create an atmosphere in which we can function to our fullest physical and mental capacities.

## **RECREATION**

If you are a man or woman of many interests, if you've made a practice of filling your leisure hours with fascinating hobbies, if you've always wished you had more time to develop your various avocations, you may as well skip this section. You will



have few, if any, recreation problems though you live to be 109.

But what of the woman who has focused her whole attention, energy, and effort on her children, who has never taken time to try her hand at any kind of craft or to explore the world of books or to test her skill in sports? Her children grow up, leave home and begin managing their own lives, leaving her suddenly without a major interest. She finds that her daily existence no longer has meaning. She has so much time and so little to do. Where will she spend all her energy, how will she express those things in her heart and mind that demand expression?

And the man whose entire life has been fashioned of business affairs and getting ahead and achieving success and prestige in his field, what is he to do when retirement snatches away the only pattern of life he knows? You've seen this man many times, you've read about him in the papers. He is the executive who, just at the time when he finds it possible to slow down and enjoy the fruits of his labors, drops dead of a heart attack or comes down with a serious malady that confines him to his bed or has a mental collapse that sends him into an institution.

You may be relieved to know that what happened to this executive is not likely to happen to you if you are at all responsive to your environment and if your community keeps pace with current trends in recreation. We have become increasingly aware in this country, in recent years, of education as a life-wide and lifelong process and of recreation as a basic need in the same dimensions. Education and recreation are closely allied in many respects. Much of our recreation is educational in content and in result, and much of our education is actually recreational in effect.

Rare, indeed—yes, practically nonexistent—is the job that satisfactorily fills all of a worker's needs. Competition in business and industry gives rise to tensions and frustrations that must be worked off, and what better way to work them off than by pursuing a creative activity that gives one a sense of achievement? It need not be an elaborate hobby. It can be something as



simple as refinishing old furniture or gardening or carving airplane models or making hooked rugs.

Developing a hobby that you find intriguing and challenging is, in no sense, a childish pastime. Rather, it is a kind of gilt-edged insurance against the isolation, loneliness, and boredom that can shrivel to dust the years at the end of life that should be full of enjoyment.

## **clubs and centers**

Special centers that offer companionship and a broad program of activities for older people are springing up in nearly every metropolitan area and in many small communities. The Katharine Engel Center in New York City is fairly typical of these havens for oldsters. Bored with themselves and their empty lives, men and women over 65 come eagerly to the center every day. Some of them work in the sheltered workshop, others play and pursue their hobbies in an atmosphere that is relaxed and comfortable. They talk over old times, and sometimes discuss common problems. Some are in their 70's, a few near 90, but all are alert and happy—and so busy that they have little time for brooding over aches and pains. It has been observed that oldsters thus engaged do not require nearly as much medical attention as those who are idle, nor are they likely to become candidates for admission to mental institutions.

Segregation of the aging has its drawbacks. They need some contact with younger people. But, by the same token, they need the company and comfort of their peers, people with whom they can share memories and reminiscences, people who are traveling in the same gear, people whose situations and needs and reactions are similar.

Golden Age Clubs, known also by a variety of other names, perform the same type of service that day centers do, often less elaborately. As a matter of fact, the day center is, in a sense, an extension of the Golden Age Club program. The Golden Age Club idea caught on so rapidly, became so popular across the

country that any community without at least a semblance of one is considered rather backward. Day centers have been set up in response to the urgent requests of elderly people who found answers to their problems in Golden Age Club activities but who could not bear the boredom and frustration of the long, empty days between meetings. It was not enough for them to feel useful and alive and creative two days a month or even one day a week.

In recent years, it has become much easier for older persons to find the kind of recreation they need and want. In addition to the various crafts, dancing, group singing, and a wide range of games, most clubs and centers provide facilities for sewing, painting, movies, and discussion and study groups—and a great effort is made to provide any activity specifically requested by club members. Some centers have taken a large additional step by establishing sheltered workshops where oldsters make up swatch or button cards, sew emblems on sweaters and do other light production work—for pay. This step, of course, goes beyond recreation, but it has been successful in filling a very real need for many elderly persons. In a few instances, day centers offer a limited employment service for their patrons, obtaining for them periodic or part-time work for which they are qualified.

Adult education administrators are giving increasing thought to courses designed for senior citizens. Communities are building public playgrounds with facilities for the elderly as well as for the young. Public libraries are beginning to provide special services for oldsters—movies, discussion groups, exhibits tailored to



the tastes of older persons, and bookmobile service for shut-ins. More and more public welfare departments are offering nonfinancial services to older people. A number of welfare agencies that maintain summer camps for youngsters have pioneered—with remarkable success—in sending golden-agers to camp. Surprisingly enough, summer camping does great things for most of them. They eat regularly and their appetites increase, they look better and feel better, and the outdoor activity serves as an effective tonic. They find the camaraderie of camp life relaxing and deeply satisfying. There is something about living close to trees and lakes and hills and stars that appeals to every age, that satisfies a universal need. It's more than a guess that this kind of constructive recreation will be opened up to increasing numbers of oldsters in the years ahead.

To those of you still in your middle years, let this section be a warning, a spur to action. If you have no interests outside your family and your job, start looking for some today. An absorbing hobby or two will pay large dividends in later years. Learn to relax—to play—to have fun....and you will enjoy your longer life.

## **FINDING SUITABLE HOUSING**

Perhaps you are very fond of the house you live in, particularly if you own it and have lived there a long time. If you raised your family there, chances are the house holds memories you enjoy living with, and it may never have occurred to you that you'll ever live anywhere else.

Your house is your fortress. Someone said that many years ago, and we've been repeating it ever since. And in a sense never intended, the observation is far too true today. Many of the old, outmoded family dwellings that widows and aged couples are grimly hanging on to are just about as comfortable and convenient and attractive as an old-fashioned fortress. Why don't they sell the place and rent more suitable quarters? Because, for many of them, the home which they own is a tangible

symbol of security and stability in a world that is constantly shifting and changing all around. Nobody can take this symbol away from them, as long as they can scrape together enough money for taxes. For them, home has become indeed a fortress, a barricade against a world that has gone on beyond them, a retreat from a society they do not understand and that they feel does not understand them.

It's rather startling to learn that two-thirds of the 15,000,000 persons 65 years old or more own their own homes. This would be a truly happy statistic if it weren't for the fact that many of these 9,000,000 home-owners would be healthier and safer living elsewhere...and happier, too, except for that need to hold on to something familiar.

You who are now in the high noon of life need not fall into this trap, need not be dominated and defeated and sentenced to solitary confinement by a house. You are fortunate. Housing for older people is a subject widely discussed, frequently studied by experts, and given high priority by federal, state and local authorities. You have time to give serious thought to your own situation, to consider all the angles and possibilities. When the time comes for a change—if it does—you will not be caught unprepared, you will be ready. Careful preparation is the major requisite for healthy adjustment to any new or different situation at any age.



## **on their own**

In our modern split-level houses and efficiency apartments, there is no room for grandparents. If there is any way to manage it, married sons and daughters leave the ancestral dwelling, move into a place of their own, however small, and bring up their children without interference from the older generation. It should come as no surprise to these married sons and daughters when their own children follow the precedent they themselves established.

These days, grandparents are on their own. Those who foresaw this turn of events and rearranged their thinking and their behavior to fit the new pattern are, by and large, happy with their relative freedom and independence. They have had their quota of worry and headache and heartache mixed with pleasure and satisfaction in the process of bringing their youngsters to adulthood. Is it any wonder that many of them are happy to escape sharing a new set of parental responsibilities?

## **meeting special needs**

What you do about living quarters after 65 will depend, in some measure, on your financial status. However, steps are now being taken to provide proper housing for at least some of the elderly citizens who are living on a minimum income. In 1956, Congress enacted legislation to facilitate construction of public housing developments with 15 per cent of the units especially designed for older tenants with small incomes. This is by no means enough to meet the need, but it is a start. In some states, carefully selected committees have been set up to study the housing needs of old people and to make recommendations to the Housing Authority.

Recommendations for safety and convenience include provision for adequate sunlight and protection from wind; two grab bars, securely mounted over the bathtub; non-slip tile floor in the bathroom; lower wall cabinets in the kitchen to avoid the use of a stool; heating facilities for 75° room temperature; gar-



bage and trash disposal facilities on each floor; readily accessible laundry facilities; protection at windows and balconies; electric stoves instead of gas; telephone and buzzer in each apartment to enable the tenant to summon help, and outsiders to check on the tenant's well-being; and, in a few apartments, doors wide enough for the passage of wheel chairs. Such housing developments are to be located near shopping areas. The majority of apartments in these developments will be designed for single persons, who predominate in the older group, but provision will also be made for couples.

It will be some time before this kind of housing is ready for occupancy by all the older persons who urgently need it. But, it is a comfort to know that it is on the way. Adequate housing has been one of the most grossly neglected needs of our older population, compounding other problems such as economic security and maintenance of health.

### **another climate?**

If you are living in the northern section of the country, where winters tend to be rugged, you may find, as you approach age 65 and are no longer tied down, that the prospect of living in a warm climate seems alluring. It has much to recommend it: no winter clothes to buy, little heating fuel to pay for, no shoveling of snow, no icy roads and sidewalks. Life is easier in the South, and the milder climate is less of a strain on tired hearts and joints battling arthritis.

But, wait. If you do decide to make the move, plan it sensibly. Don't pull up all stakes, burn all bridges. You may not care to stay in the South, you may be homesick for your friends and for the community you feel a part of. Go south for a year, or part of a year. Give it a trial run, but leave something to go back to if it doesn't work out.

The same procedure is suggested if you should decide to enter a home for older persons—and such a decision is not unusual these days. There is much to recommend this move, too.



## **enter a home?**

There are some excellent homes across the country, operated by fraternal orders, religious groups, or private groups or individuals. These vary in cost and entrance requirements, but they generally provide comfort and security, good food and good care, recreation and companionship. More than one person has walked reluctantly through the gates of one of these homes to find that it is not at all the way he had imagined it, that it provides precisely the kind of life he wants and the kind of care he needs. The residents, in most instances, are free to come and go, have visitors and go visiting, go shopping or to the movies—in short, to live just about as they would on their own. But, in case of accident or illness, there is someone ready to give expert and immediate aid.

Don't check off the possibility of a home, not without first investigating. The decision should be yours, not your family's. A geriatrics authority, called in by two sons to convince their mother that she must go into a home because, living alone at 80, she might break an arm or leg and there'd be no one to help her, made this observation: "If you send your mother to a home against her will, you will be protecting her against broken bones at the expense of a broken heart."

Housing quite frequently turns out to be the reef on which old age is wrecked. More often than not, an elderly father or mother, suddenly left alone, finds it easier to go along with plans made for him or her by sons and daughters than to assert his or her own wishes.

It is not impossible for three generations to live happily under one roof, but it is exceedingly difficult and requires a maximum of tact, consideration, understanding, and self-control on everyone's part. It is fairly safe to say that a happier situation always results from the separation of living quarters, even though that separation be no more than a driveway between dwellings.

In these days of easy, fast, and inexpensive transportation, many oldsters feel quite free to pull up stakes and establish a

home in a community hundreds of miles away from their nearest of kin. In case they are needed, they can be on hand in a matter of hours. The so-called retirement communities are becoming more and more alluring to older persons, both couples and single persons. If the retired individual moves to a community where most of his neighbors and nearly all the friends he will find are also retired, he may be happier. Many of the problems associated with retirement are automatically solved in such an environment. Retirement is the accepted—indeed, the preferred—status. It is comforting to associate with one's peers, to know that one's problems are not unique and so can be freely discussed, to meet friends on safe, common ground. Retirement groups within larger communities are flourishing in the South and on the West Coast where weather conditions are kinder to arthritic bones and tired muscles, and such groups are beginning to form in other areas as well. What is more logical, more normal than the urge to be part of a group whose pattern of living is similar to your own?

Your home is where you spend more and more time as the years roll by. Your home is tremendously important . . . and becomes more so toward the end of life. It should give you security, comfort, and many peaceful, pleasant hours. The planning you do for it, the thought you give to it as you travel through your middle years will pay enormous dividends later.

## **FAMILY, FRIENDS, AND COMMUNITY**

The ability to enjoy your later years is not something wrapped in a pretty package and presented to you by a relative, a friend, a social worker, or a government representative. It requires an atmosphere of mutual understanding and respect, a willingness on everybody's part to share responsibilities and to plan realistically both on an individual and a community basis.

Let's assume that you have been foresighted enough to make financial provision for your old age, that you have developed

many interests that you plan to follow through after retirement, that you have safeguarded your health. Still there is a nagging fear at the back of your mind as day follows day, and year follows year. It's the fear of rejection by the younger members of your family, your younger friends, by the community.

There is some basis for your fear, it is true. But it may be that you are distorting the picture. Perhaps you recall hearing, on a recent television documentary, the statement of an elderly gentleman who, for lack of funds and resources, was spending his later years on New York's dismal Bowery. He said, "The worst thing about growing old is that people don't like old folks." Listening to him, one wondered whether he, in turn, really liked people—whether he ever went out of his way to be considerate or pleasant to the people he met. And, overshadowing his statement, were the statements of many other elderly persons interviewed during that telecast, men and women still active despite their years, still contributing in one way or another to the life around them. They expressed no feeling of rejection. Indeed, many of them agreed that the term "Golden Years" has genuine significance.

### **acceptance or rejection?**

Your acceptance or rejection by family, friends, and community will depend, in large measure, on two factors—and the greatest of these is you. Each of us must face the fairly well established fact these days that we will not be respected and beloved simply because we are old. This was the case, perhaps in your great-grandparents' day, but not now. It is no longer any great feat to attain old age. Nearly everybody's doing it. If we want affection and respect and consideration from others as the shadows lengthen across our afternoon, we must earn it by first giving to others our affection and respect and consideration. We will find our relationships happier all round if we can manage to show interest in the present and future, rather than dwell increasingly on the past—if we refrain from constant

criticism even though we feel it is justified—if we learn to accept people and things as they are, without always wanting them to be as they were in what we think of as “the good old days.”

### **our changing attitudes**

The second major factor influencing acceptance or rejection of the elderly is education. During the past decade, the attitudes of individuals, of groups, of communities toward the aging have undergone marked change. Although it still leaves much to be desired, the change, measured by accepted standards, has occurred with amazing rapidity. What sparked it? A number of things. First, knowledge of the lengthened life-span, with its personal implications. Second, the tendency of more and more people, on seeing an aged individual, to think, “there, in a certain number of years, go I.” Third, the increasing attention given by federal, state and local government groups to all aspects of the aging and their problems. Fourth, increased community action in behalf of the aging, with participation of an ever-growing number of citizens. All of this comes under the heading of education, in its broadest sense. As for formal, classroom education, already some schools are making it clear to youngsters that plans for their future must extend beyond college and a career, marriage, and a home. They must take into account the years of retirement if they are to be practical and realistic.

Our whole concept of age is changing, and long-standing taboos are being discarded. The later years are no longer a period of vegetation, of resignation, of waiting. They can be a harvest—a time of relaxed enjoyment, of fulfillment.

The medical and scientific developments that have so remarkably extended our life span in the past half-century were tremendously exciting. But even more exciting is the challenge to make those added years rich and creative and happy.

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